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FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0383
INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 0647
RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 0424

UNCLAS CHIANG MAI 000021

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV TH

SUBJECT: NORTHERN HEARTS STILL BELONG TO THAKSIN

REF: A. A) CHIANG MAI 20 (ANTI-CNS LEAFLETS STIR IN MUSLIM ISSUES)

¶B. B) CHIANG MAI 07 (CHIANG RAI RATED "SUSPECT PROVINCE")

¶11. (U) Summary. In the four-plus months since the Sept. 19 coup, the Council for National Security (CNS) and interim government have not won many hearts and minds in northern Thailand. Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party loyalists made their feelings known at the well-attended, media-rich funeral in Chiang Rai Jan. 16 for a school teacher who died from beatings in southern Thailand violence. Anti-CNS materials that crop up now and then keep the current power holders on edge. End summary

¶12. (SBU) Two contacts who attended the Jan. 16 funeral of teacher Juling Pongkanmool in a rural village of Amphoe Doi Luang, Chiang Rai province, reported spontaneous cheers for acting Thai Rak Thai leader Chaturon Chaisaeng as he proceeded to the funeral site. Other dignitaries, including Prime Minister Gen Surayud Chulanont, failed to draw similar applause from the crowd of 10,000-plus that came to honor the Chiang Rai native who dedicated herself to teaching children in the troubled south.

¶13. (SBU) Although the incident did not appear in media coverage of the funeral, which was presided over by the Crown Prince and Crown Princess, it reportedly upset provincial officials who were responsible for taking care of their superiors. TRT members who attended the ceremony interpreted the cheers as evidence that TRT policies, particularly village funds and the CEO Governor budget, still appeal to rural voters. Former TRT Chiang Rai MP Samart Kaewmechai predicted another landslide victory for the party or its successor in the next general election.

¶14. (SBU) Ironically, the very person cited as responsible for earning Chiang Rai its "suspect" label (ref b), is also seen as the reason for the absence of arson attacks that in other provinces have been construed as acts of defiance to the CNS. Former National Resources and Environment Minister Yongyut Tiyapairat, one of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's close political confidants, has reportedly honored a promise to the CNS to keep a low profile. In return, Yongyut has not been charged or investigated by the CNS-installed Assets Examination Committee, unlike his TRT colleague from Buriram, Newin Chidchop.

¶15. (U) In another incident involving anti-CNS materials (ref a), local police in Chiang Mai's Saraphi district blocked the distribution of copies of a Jan. 2 letter that Thaksin wrote to his supporters. Local police notified military officials of the incident but made no arrests on condition that the actions stop. One TRT representative who was handing out the letter along with blankets in remote villages was reportedly summoned for questioning by military authorities.

CAMP